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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003327

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISLAMIC ACTION FRONT LEADERS TO U.S.: DIALOGUE,
YES; AGREEMENT, NO

REF: AMMAN 778

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM FOR REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D).

1. (C) On June 13, Poloff and PA Cultural Exchange Visitor Imam Yahya Hindi met with Islamic Action Front (IAF) leaders Hamza Mansour (IAF Secretary General), Abdel Latif Arabiyat (IAF Shura Council President), Jamil Abu Bakir (Chairman of the Board for the weekly IAF newspaper, Assabeel), and Sa'ud Abu Mahfuz (Assabeel General Manager). The primary purpose of Hindi's visit to Jordan was to communicate his view of Muslim experience in the U.S. post-9/11, to counter rumors and anecdotes now circulating in the region about treatment of Muslims in the U.S. The narrower purpose of the June 13 meeting was to step closer toward the resumption of routine contacts between the Embassy and the IAF, disrupted two years ago by a series of visa issues involving prominent Muslim leaders.

A CALL FOR DIALOGUE

2. (C) IAF leaders welcomed Poloff and Hindi, both of whom are known to IAF leaders from past meetings. Hindi then uncorked a variation on a theme he stressed during the entire course of his visit to Jordan, encouraging IAF leaders to engage in dialogue with U.S. officials on issues of common interest to the U.S. and Muslims.

DIALOGUE, YES; AGREEMENT, NO

3. (C) Hindi's call for dialogue provoked substantively aggressive, though politely delivered, responses from IAF leaders:

- Arabiyat agreed on the need for dialogue. He further stated his respect for U.S. foundational values (i.e., democracy, freedom, and justice), but criticized what he sees as U.S. abandonment of these values in reflexive enmity towards Islam and a unholy war against Muslims. Arabiyat feels the U.S. could benefit from the reinsertion of moral values -- values that could be supplied by Islam -- into its culture. In saying this, he invoked the notion of a U.S.-Muslim partnership.

- Arabiyat also accused the U.S. of running a war against Muslims. As evidence of American malice, Arabiyat cited a recent speech wherein President Bush supposedly promised "American zionists" he would wage war on Muslims until "they stand defenseless and clean-shaven." When Poloff asked to see a copy of the speech, one of Arabiyat's junior colleagues clarified that Arabiyat had been quoting Arab commentary on a speech rather than the speech itself. Arabiyat, not greatly deterred by the snafu in sourcing, seamlessly wound up with a warning that Muslims have less to lose than the U.S. in a war with the U.S.

- Mansour acknowledged the role of Muslim-Americans in "balancing" U.S. views towards Islam, but stressed the "duty" of U.S. embassies to candidly report trends and sensibilities within Muslim countries. In this sense, Mansour said he supports dialogue between the U.S. Embassy and the IAF. Mansour apologetically explained that anti-U.S. sentiment at all levels of Jordanian society prevented him from attending a June 11 luncheon honoring Hindi. In a June 9 letter to the Embassy, Mansour wrote that accepting "such an invitation would seriously compromise our principles" until "US policy is changed to a more just and even-handed posture." Hindi bluntly commented that this type of wasted opportunity was inexcusable and potentially detrimental to the IAF.

- Mansour also asserted that the U.S.-led "war on Islam" harms Islamist moderates by complicating their efforts to garner support against extremists. As evidence that the U.S. is waging war on Islam, Mansour cited an unidentified recent poll supposedly showing that "73% of Americans support war on Islamists" as well as Rumsfeld's effort to "humiliate" Pakistan's President Musharraf during his recent South Asian tour. As evidence that the U.S. ignores its moderate Islamic friends, Mansour recalled the "uncivilized" revocation of his own visa in 2000. Switching subjects, Mansour noted that the IAF "has never accepted Arafat" but felt it was not up to the

U.S. to meddle in the decision of who should be leading the Palestinian people.

- Abu Bakir likewise supported dialogue with the U.S. and its representatives, saying he considered this a religious imperative. The strength of the imperative is counterbalanced by a duty to assist Muslims who are everywhere beset by "external pressures." Many doubt the efficacy of dialogue in any event, which also undermines moderates. Abu Bakir, speaking of Muslims collectively, said "we are a nation that can be captivated by a good deed." But no good deeds have been forthcoming from the U.S., which supports regimes (read: the Hashemite regime in Jordan) that do not represent their people.

- Abu Mahfuz noted the burgeoning "hatred" for the U.S. within the Arab world, as distinguished from more moderate sentiments directed at European countries. He was also puzzled over why the U.S. deals with the GOJ rather than the Islamists, who (he says) have greater representation among Jordanians than the GOJ. Abu Mahfuz affirmed that he does not want the U.S. as an enemy. But, he said, if the U.S. chooses to wage war on Islam, Muslims will be "patient" (or "resolute"), the U.S. will bear the costs of the hatred it foments, and justice will ultimately prevail.

14. (C) Poloff responded that the IAF's fundamental misperception of the U.S. as duplicitously waging war against Islam is an illustration of the need for dialogue between Islamists and U.S. officials. Hindi added that dialogue is actually working to get the Muslim viewpoint across in the U.S. In the interest of better understanding the Islamist movement, Poloff also obtained commitments for additional meetings focusing on a range of issues concerning Islamists in Jordan.

COMMENT

15. (C) Notwithstanding their polemics, the IAF leaders attending the meeting presented themselves as moderates who have suffered because of their relatively conciliatory stance towards the U.S. They advocated symbiosis between the U.S. and Islamist moderates as mutually beneficial -- with the understanding that they consider current U.S. policies flawed and counterproductive. Still, while it is clear what the IAF opposes, it is not so obvious what they support, even on basic social and economic issues. Our renewed contacts with them, along with the likelihood of elections and campaign platforms this year, should help clarify the crosscurrents in a highly diverse movement. End comment.
Gnehm